

# KELLY

FOR MAYOR



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## **2021 MAYORAL CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE** (PLEASE TYPE YOUR RESPONSES IN THE SPACE PROVIDED.)

### Questions:

1. Please provide personal biographical data including information on your family, community involvement, work history, and your qualifications for office.

As a localist, I believe firmly that our attention should be focused on helping our neighbors, and I feel that my pursuits in the business and nonprofit world reflect that belief. I'm the chairman and co-founder of the Chattanooga Football Club, and the list of companies I own, co-own, founded and/or operate includes Kelly Subaru (recently sold), Chattanooga Brewing Company, Southern Honda Powersports, SocialBot and Workshop. As a civic leader, I have served on boards for the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Chattanooga, the Benwood Foundation, River City Company, Allied Arts (now ArtsBuild), Chattanooga 2.0, Tivoli Theatre Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, among others. In many ways it was my work with nonprofit groups that opened my eyes to the potential of leveraging a more effective city government to fix the structural issues that hold Chattanooga back. I have had a front row seat for decades where it was my responsibility to grapple with Chattanooga's social, economic, and cultural issues, and I feel I'm therefore well-qualified to identify and address those problems.

Born in April 1967, I am a lifelong resident of Chattanooga, and it will always be my home. I have no political ambitions beyond becoming this city's mayor and getting Chattanooga back on the right track. Growing up in a family that emphasized servant leadership, I still embrace that approach today. Though I am known these days for my business career and work on non-profit boards, it took a lifetime of lessons, learned both from my parents and my community, to make me the leader I am today. I got my first job at age 15, working as a busboy at the original Vine Street Market. I continued to work through summers in high school at my family's dealership as a porter and a parts clerk. After

earning my degree in 1989, I returned to Chattanooga to work at the dealership that my grandfather, Jim Ayers, founded in 1936. I soon began making my mark in the Scenic City — coaching my sons' Little League baseball teams, joining non-profit organizations to address community concerns, and even teaching entrepreneurship and marketing as an adjunct professor at UTC. As I embraced my civic responsibilities, I also doubled down on my business ventures, adding more locations to the automotive and powersports businesses and expanding into digital marketing and a Chattanooga restaurant. I also co-founded Chattanooga's local, independent professional soccer club, the Chattanooga Football Club.

## **2. Please describe your experience/relationship with public schools.**

I worked extensively on the Hamilton County Schools budget working group to blaze a path forward to increase teacher pay, invest in technology, add social workers and school counselors, and invest in better schools to benefit our students. I also advocated for a modest tax increase at the county level to ensure that we can guarantee a great education for all students, no matter their zip code.

Because of the budget working group's recommendations, which included investing in a more professional staff at the administration level, HCS hired Dr. Bryan Johnson as Superintendent, as well as Brent Goldberg as Chief Business Officer, and their performance has been superlative. I've asked Brent to work with me on the campaign as my Chief of Staff, and I hope I'll be lucky enough to have him serve with me at the city. I also worked on Chattanooga 2.0, at Benwood and other nonprofits to ensure that the community stays involved, both financially and philosophically, in the future of education in our city.

I have a great working relationship with Dr. Bryan Johnson and as mayor I will ensure that the City supports Hamilton County Schools in every way possible. Education is the great equalizer, and I will never stop working to ensure that we give opportunity and options to our students.

## **3. Describe your platform's impact on the future of public education in Chattanooga.**

The City of Chattanooga stopped operating schools 24 years ago, but this does not mean the City doesn't have an important role in ensuring every family and child have access to an excellent education. Education is the single most important issue for the future of Chattanooga. We must embrace the City's role in educating our children in order to move Chattanooga forward.

Key Areas of Focus:

QUALITY PRE-K FOR ALL - A robust education system begins with early childhood education. The city does not currently fund K-12 education, but can and must play a larger role in preparing students to enter kindergarten.

- Better-prepared kindergarten students are more likely to excel and thrive throughout their educational journey.
- Brain development progresses at an accelerated rate in a student's early years, as a city we must capitalize on this opportunity and not let it pass by.
- Children must learn their letters, numbers, colors and more before entering kindergarten in order to be prepared for the rigors of K-12 and avoid remedial learning.

- Parents also benefit from a robust Pre-K program because having access to quality early childhood education and childcare will allow them the flexibility to pursue their own educational and employment opportunities.

HEAD START - Children learn best early, through rich interactions with other adults and their peers in safe and positive learning environments.

- As one of the primary ways our city provides quality early childhood educational programming, Chattanooga's next mayor must expand and refine this critical program.
- The city will raise the minimum wage for Head Start teachers to \$15 per hour as part of the 100-day action plan.
- Expand access to Head Start to more children by partnering with nonprofit organizations to increase outreach and program scale.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS - An excellent early childhood education system engages partners across the entire community, working toward the same goal of ensuring every child has access to the resources they need to succeed and thrive.

- Partner with the Early Matters Coalition, a collection of 40 local organizations focused on early childhood education, to significantly increase the number of quality Pre-K seats and quality childcare facilities available to all Chattanooga residents.
- Reinforce and expand successful initiatives and programs throughout the city without duplicating existing efforts.
- Establish an education partnership with Hamilton County Schools and the Chamber of Commerce to jointly develop cradle to career pathways from poverty to opportunity.

SUPPORT HAMILTON COUNTY SCHOOLS - While the city does not currently fund K-12 education, the City of Chattanooga has an obligation to its parents and children to ensure each family has access to a great education.

- Provide resources to schools located within the City of Chattanooga, including targeted investments coordinated with Hamilton County Schools to meet specific needs.
- Expand public transit coverage and options to better serve locations near Future Ready Institutes
- Partner with Hamilton County Schools to jointly drive appropriate resources toward the school district in partnership with officials across the state, and ensure accountability for those resources.
- Robust, accessible, and affordable Pre-K for all will ensure that students entering Hamilton County Schools are prepared for kindergarten and beyond.

SKILLED TRADES EDUCATION- Students who learn a trade can chart a path to a flourishing career and a successful future.

- Commit City resources to launch a trade school in partnership with Hamilton County Schools and other key public and private partners.
- Partner with trade organizations to develop successful apprenticeship programs across the city as a key component of a workforce development strategy.
- Support Hamilton County Schools' Future Ready Institutes.

ADVOCACY - The mayor of Chattanooga must be a strong advocate for better opportunities, options, and outcomes for children and families in our city.

- The Mayor's office will be the chief advocate for education in the city.
- Elevate the Office of Early Childhood Education to a full department focused on education policy, partnerships, and access.
- The Mayor will fight for a properly funded school system for Chattanooga families.

For more information:

<https://www.kellyforcha.com/blog/education-vision-2021>

<https://www.kellyforcha.com/first100days>

#### **4. What is the role of the city in public education and how do you see its resources positively impacting students in our area?**

In addition to the plans outlined above, I believe there are five core principles that as mayor I will follow to ensure that we continue to invest in education, which will positively impact students in Chattanooga and set an example for others to follow.

OPPORTUNITY - Every child must have opportunities to learn and grow.

EXCELLENCE - Chattanooga's long-term success requires an education system that is excellent and effective from cradle-to-career.

ACCESS - A child's zip code should never determine their future.

VOICE – The City of Chattanooga has an important role and voice in ensuring all children in our city have access to an effective and excellent education system.

PARTNERSHIP - A thriving educational system requires robust partnerships across our entire community, engaging businesses, non-profits, and local government.

For more information:

<https://www.kellyforcha.com/blog/education-vision-2021>

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Please email your response by **January 25 at 6:00 PM** to [president@hceaeducators.org](mailto:president@hceaeducators.org)  
[hcfce@gmail.com](mailto:hcfce@gmail.com)